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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000759

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PTER KDEM IZ

SUBJECT: SALAH AD DIN: YUNIS BA'ATH FACTION SEEKS RECONCILIATION; SAYS IT CAN SPLIT AL DURI'S FACTION

REF: BAGHDAD 598

Classified By: PRT Salah Ad Din Leader Rick Bell for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

(U) This is a PRT Salah Ad Din (SAD) reporting cable. See action request for Department and Embassy Baghdad, para 11.

¶1. (S) SUMMARY: Men purporting to represent the Muhammad Yunis Ahmed (MYA) faction of the Ba'ath Party (BP) told Coalition Forces (CF) and the PRT on March 14 that the faction wants to reconcile now, and can bring some of Izzat Ibrahim al-Duri's IAD faction along. MYA is ready to meet with a senior USG official, they said. They stressed that they were speaking in confidence: fearing for their own safety, they have not yet contacted the Government of Iraq (GOI). PRT requests Department and Embassy assistance in determining their bona fides. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (S) On March 14, the PRT and CF met with four men who identified themselves as senior Ba'ath Party officials. They provided the following unconfirmed information about themselves:

- XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX Was three-star general and division commander under Saddam; XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
- XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX Member of SaD Sheikhs' Council, chairman of the Ad-Dawr Sheikhs' Council. Brigadier general in former regime. XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
- XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX Senior official in the former Iraqi Intelligence Services (commander of the five southern provinces). XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
- XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX. Former brigadier general in the air force XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX.

¶3. (S) The men said they intended this meeting as a formal first step, personally authorized by Mohammed Yunis Ahmed (MYA), in seeking USG intervention to help reconcile the Ba'ath Party (BP) to the GOI. As MYA's putative spokesman, XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX did most of the speaking. This cable relays considerable detail in order to convey the level of discourse. XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX passed a message that MYA is willing to meet personally with a high-level USG official to discuss reconciliation.

¶4. (S) XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX said the BP is organized and planning for the future. He explained that it has split into two groups, one following IAD and the other MYA. IAD is not willing to negotiate or admit that the BP ever made mistakes. MYA has been looking back and believes that Saddam's regime made many mistakes. His faction would like to find a peaceful way to participate in the democratic process. They have not yet been in touch with the GOI because they fear the GOI is under Iranian influence and will seek revenge against any BP members. MYA's group wants USG assistance to reconcile because it believes that after the U.S. leaves Iraq, it will be much harder to negotiate and if reconciliation is not

already well underway by then, there will likely be bloodshed. XXXXXXXXXXXX  
said that there are about four million BP members who will need to protect themselves because Iranians and Shi'a will persecute them and their families. Some of IAD's supporters have told MYA's group that they also want to reconcile, even without IAD

¶ 15. (S) XXXXXXXXXXXX discussed BP dissatisfaction with the way Iraq has been run since the 2003 invasion. The BP was in existence for 62 years and in power for 35 years. It was very influential in building Iraqi society. All educated people today were educated under the old regime, which was built by the BP. Although there were problems during its rule, the last six years have been "ten times worse." Two million Iraqis have been killed, two million displaced outside the country, and four million displaced internally. The U.S. bears a share of moral and legal responsibility for this. President Bush admitted that the invasion was based on false intelligence regarding WMD. Now the US has allowed Iran to develop nuclear capabilities, making that country a greater threat than it already was. The GOI is divided and corrupt, built on sectarianism. Under the BP all ethnic groups were included. What have the Iraqis gained for paying such a price? No infrastructure and poor basic services. The quality of life in Iraq has become worse.

¶ 16. (S) The BP is not against democracy, XXXXXXXXXXXX said, but fears sectarianism and Iranian influence. It wants to

BAGHDAD 00000759 002 OF 002

participate in political life and is against violence. The current democracy is built on sectarianism. This has led to strife, kidnappings and assassinations. Many now fear that the U.S. wants to turn Iraq over to Iran; just as Iran is led by the mullahs, GOI officials now consult Ayatollah Sistani before making decisions. Shiites show how irrational they are in the way they flagellate and beat themselves. The Shi'a are loyal to Iran; Iraq could be returning to medieval times.

¶ 17. (S) The current Iraqi Army (IA) is poorly trained, more like a militia than a professional army, said Khalaf. The U.S. has signed a contract to turn over weapon systems to the IA; those weapons should be given to trained professionals. Many of the weapons will just end up in the hands of Shiite soldiers who are like militiamen. Not all of the IA are militias, some are professional, but the top leaders lack training. The best, most experienced senior officers are outside Iraq now or are just sitting around at home. XXXXXXXXXXXX said that MYA has issued an order that BP members are prohibited from serving in the new ISF.

¶ 18. (S) The MYA faction now believes multi-party democracy is an option, XXXXXXXXXXXX continued. IAD does not agree with MYA, who wants to review BP activities and leadership from 1968 to the occupation, in order to identify mistakes and put in place a strategy for a changed party. IAD absolutely refuses and believes he should lead the BP. Because of this disagreement the BP had a conference in December 2007 that elected MYA as commander. The MYA faction believes the way forward must be peaceful, and refuses to use violence. If the BP is allowed to compete politically, the will of the people will decide. The party just wants the same opportunities as others; it wants to announce that the BP is back now. Even if it is forbidden to have meetings, the BP is "in our hearts and minds, it represents our values, so you cannot just get rid of it with a quick decision." People believe in the BP more now, and the BP includes all ethnic groups. The security agencies know that the BP did not commit crimes, actually it fought against AQI. The BP had longstanding problems with AQI before 2003, and suffered many losses.

¶ 9. (S) So many Iraqis have been murdered by groups like Badr, Mahdi Army, former Interior Minister Solah, Quds Force, and others. The BP wants peace. Iran stopped the killing when CF started paying attention to the connection of Iranians to the violence, but after the U.S. leaves, it will start again. PM Maliki's words are empty. Iran is getting revenge for the Iran-Iraq War. A month ago, the GOI banned the use of the word "martyr" for soldiers killed during the war with Iran. Now those dead soldiers are referred to as "victims of the past regime." This takes away their honor for serving their country as soldiers during the war. BP is not so narrow-minded now. It wants to have an army that represents everybody. The Iraqi Constitution was written too quickly and is filled with problems. Iraq has the trappings of democracy such as ballot boxes, but sectarianism corrupts the result. President Obama said U.S. forces are leaving, so "we have no more problems with you now" - help us get the ban on the BP lifted, and pardon the loyal nationalist insurgents.

¶ 10. (S) XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX and his colleagues stressed that they were speaking in confidence to the USG. They explained that they had not approached the GOI yet because they fear they will be arrested even though the GOI does not have warrants for them. Qarrested even though the GOI does not have warrants for them. "Ninety-five percent of us did nothing wrong. If there are criminals then try them under the criminal laws, but allow us to bring back the BP."

¶ 11. (S) COMMENT AND ACTION REQUEST: PRT requests Embassy and Department assistance in verifying the bona fides of XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX Nassir, et al. The PRT will work with CF try to determine whether the delegation truly represents MYA. It is not clear whether there is any connection between this meeting and the PRT Tikrit Satellite representative's discussion of similar issues with Sheikh Hassan Nida of Saddam's tribe, Albu Nasser (reftel). END COMMENT AND ACTION REQUEST.  
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